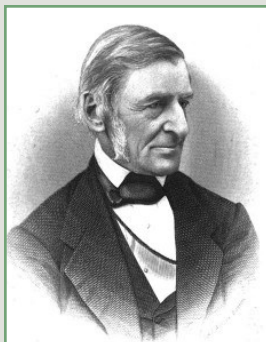
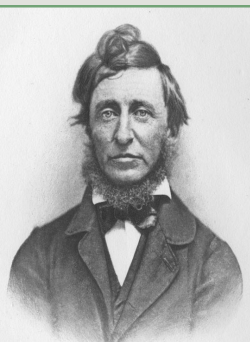




## Emerson-Thoreau Amble Guide



Ralph Waldo Emerson



Henry David Thoreau



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*Prepared by the Division of Natural Resources, 2021.*



Bridge Over Mill Brook

### In Emerson and Thoreau's Footsteps

This trail represents an approximate walking route used by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau from Emerson's "Bush" house to Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond. The natural beauty and tranquility of the forest, combined with the cultural and historical features rooted here makes the Amble a unique walking experience. "I study the art of solitude" Emerson wrote, hearing the woods summoning him for a walk. Take a walk on the Emerson-Thoreau Amble to find your own solitude.



### Location and Access

The trail begins just east of Concord Center, passing through Heywood Meadow to the "Emerson-Thoreau Amble" sign behind the Gun House on Lexington Road. There is free municipal parking a few blocks into town off Walden Street.

At the mid-point of the Amble is parking for more than 20 vehicles at the Town Forest, on the east side of Walden Street, ¼ mile south of Route 2. The Amble is a short walk past the "Hapgood Wright Town Forest" sign to a fork on the main trail, either direction taking you to the Amble beside Fairyland Pond.

At Walden Pond, parking is available for a nominal charge at the Walden Pond State Reservation off Route 126. A trail across Route 126 from the parking lot follows the edge of Walden Pond ¼-mile to the start of the Amble from the Thoreau cabin site.

**Dog Owners:** Keep dogs leashed or under your control at all times and away from private yards and buildings. It is the duty of each person who owns, possesses, or controls a dog to remove and dispose of any waste left by his or her dog.



# Emerson-Thoreau Amble

Emerson Thoreau Amble

Main (yellow blazes)

Secondary (red blazes)

Connecting (blue blazes)

Other Public Trails (not blazed)

Harry Beyer Assessed Trail

Town Conservation Land

Other Town Land

Land Trust Land

State Land

Rivers & Ponds

Wetlands

Kiosk

Parking

Handicap Parking

Bridge

Point of Interest

Bench

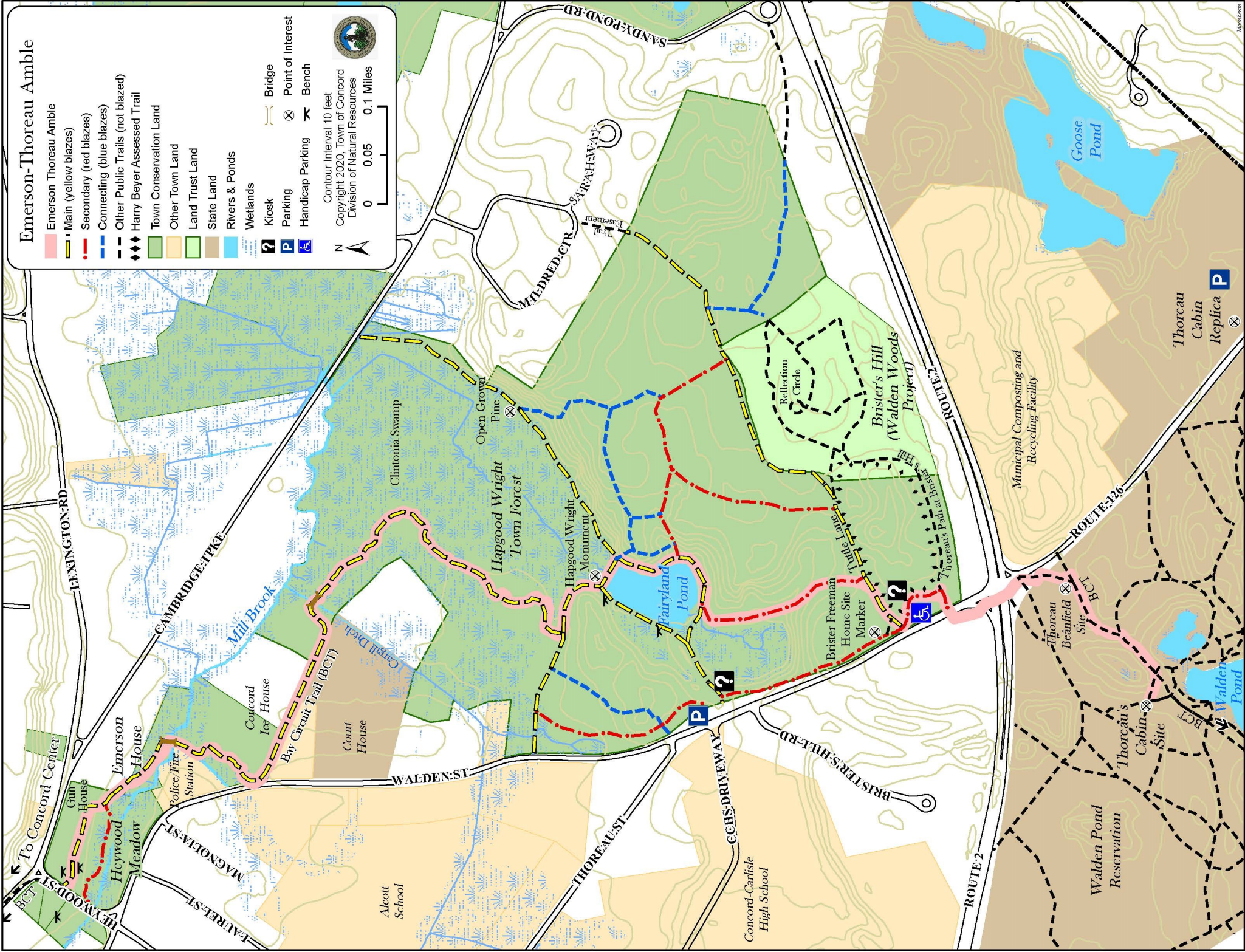
Contour Interval 10 feet

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Division of Natural Resources

0 0.05 0.1 Miles

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## Emerson-Thoreau Amble

### The Amble Walk

The Emerson-Thoreau Amble is a 1.7-mile walking path, over public and private property, blazed throughout with trail markers bearing a silhouette of the two famed authors. From its beginning at Heywood Meadow near Concord Center, the Amble passes through damp lowland along the Mill Brook behind Ralph Waldo Emerson's House until it crosses a wooden footbridge over the Brook and emerges beside Walden Street. The trail turns left onto a cart path and continues past the Concord Ice Company, then left again into the Hapgood Wright Town Forest. After crossing a second footbridge over Hugh Cargill's Ditch, the trail passes through a dense pine woodland. At Fairyland Pond, the Amble proceeds clockwise around the pond, then left up a hill to Brister's Spring. From the spring, the trail continues to climb Brister's Hill, turning right at the next trail intersection onto Tuttle Lane. A short distance after passing the Brister Freeman homesite marker, the Amble crosses Walden Street to a pedestrian crosswalk at MA Route 2. From the sidewalk along Route 126, the trail turns right into the woods of Walden Pond State Reservation where it reaches its destination, the site of Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond. Walking time: 40 to 60 minutes, one way.

### Points of Interest

#### Heywood Meadow

The history of the meadow goes back to Luke Potter, who built his house here in 1635. An early mill pond between Heywood Street and Main Street had been drained and filled by Thoreau and Emerson's time. With few exceptions, the meadow has always been an open area used for agriculture, owned by the extended Heywood family for more than 300 years. Once the meadow was no longer used

for agriculture, it was perceived as vacant land, and saw various development proposals until residents and the Town worked to secure the 8-acre meadow as conservation land. The only structure remaining in the meadow is the Gun House of the Concord Independent Artillery Battery. It was built in 1960 to house the two bronze artillery pieces used by the Concord Battery on ceremonial occasions, which were cast late 18th century.

#### Emerson House

A look through trees from the Amble reveals the back of the Emerson House, which the Emerson family affectionately referred to as "Bush" after the many trees Emerson planted on the property. The Emersons lived at "Bush" from 1835 to 1882. Thoreau sometimes shared quarters here and cared for the Emerson children. Emerson and Thoreau's many ambles started from the back yard of the Emerson house a short distance from Heywood Meadow. **Respect for the owner of this, and all private property, must be observed by staying on the trail.**

#### Along the Mill Brook

As the trail leaves Heywood Meadow, it passes through a wet, low-lying area along the Mill Brook lush with moisture-loving plants such as cattails, white turtlehead, willow-herb, jewelweed, and joe-pye weed along with wildflowers and invasive shrubs. Watercress grows abundantly in the brook, as it does in springs and streams throughout Concord. Thoreau took credit for introducing this non-native plant to Concord.

The Mill Brook played an important role in the lives of inhabitants from before the founding of the town in 1635. Flowing from its source north of Route 2 just above Crosby's Pond, the Mill Brook once supplied water for cattle and filled a mill pond used to power a grist mill. There was a footbridge over the Mill Brook in Thoreau and

Emerson's time, in the vicinity of the Mill Brook crossing on the Amble today.

#### The "Ice House"

The Amble passes the Concord Ice Company buildings that date to the mid-1890's, originally built for Edward Maker's furniture moving and general contracting business. Since 1906, various ice companies operated here, supplying block ice harvested from nearby ponds for home ice boxes before refrigeration was in common use. **Respect for the owner of this, and all private property, must be observed by staying on the cart path.**

An old field to the right of the cart path beyond the Ice House is rich in meadow wildflowers, insects, and songbirds. The hedgerows are filled with invasive, non-native shrubs and vines along with oak, young white pine, ninebark, and little-leaf linden. Seasonal highlights include mullein, various goldenrods, common milkweed, and New England aster, all especially beautiful in the late summer and autumn months.

#### Hugh Cargill Ditch

The trail re-enters woodland and crosses a second footbridge over Hugh Cargill's Ditch, excavated in the 1800s to remove excess groundwater from Hugh Cargill's agricultural fields, Stratton Farm, which he left to Concord for the benefit of the poor. Hugh Cargill was a notable figure, who arrived in the colonies with the British troops, but soon left the British, taking a stand with the minutemen at Concord on April 19, 1775. He went on to become a wealthy innkeeper in Boston before retiring to Concord in 1796. Thoreau mentions in Walden, "the present dusty highway, from the Stratton, now the Alms House Farm, to Brister's Hill."

## **Woodland Approach to Hapgood Wright Forest**

From the footbridge, the Amble enters damp terrain populated by poplars, willows, and red maples. Royal fern, elderberry, and joe-pye weed in sunnier areas give way to shade-loving plants, as young to maturing pines fill in the landscape with club mosses and Canada mayflowers underfoot in drier areas. This area was once used by the town Natural Resources Department to grow nursery stock for town plantings, which may account for the occasional surprising tree varieties found here.

## **Hapgood Wright Monument**

At a trail junction near the outflow of Fairyland Pond, a stone monument recognizes Hapgood Wright who provided funds for the town to purchase the original 78-acre parcel that bears his name. Wright made the gift on the occasion of Concord's 250th anniversary, September 12, 1885. His gift of \$1,000 was to be invested for fifty years, after which it could be spent for the improvement of the town. In 1935, Concord used the funds to purchase the Fairyland parcel, deemed "the most beautiful place in town", and set this monument at the pond in appreciation of Wright's gift. It was Concord's first acquisition of conservation land, and with subsequent additions, became its largest at 183 acres.

## **Fairyland Pond**

The centerpiece of the Hapgood Wright Forest is Fairyland Pond, formed in the late 1800s by damming up a swamp below Brister's Hill. Henry David Thoreau referred to the hollow as "Hubbard's Close" or "Hubbard's shady swamp", named for its owner Ebenezer Hubbard. The swamp was part of the uninterrupted woodland surrounding Walden Pond where he led the Alcott girls and Emerson children on berry-picking trips, fancifully calling it "fairyland", the likely origin of the name given to the area by the townspeople. Fairyland Pond as it appears today is a 2.75-acre shallow pond held by a dam.

A visit to the pond is a quiet retreat from the noise of highway traffic above Brister's Hill. Cattails grow along the pond's marshy southern shore and pond lilies float along its long shallow surface. The pond is rimmed with sweet pepperbush, high-bush blueberry and speckled alder, with a surrounding forest of red oak, pine, hemlock, yellow birch, American chestnut saplings, and dogwood. All contribute to an ongoing pageant of seasonal color and bloom mirrored in the water. When winter sets in, the ice-covered pond and snow-covered landscape reflect winter's light with particular beauty.

## **Brister's Hill and Forest Topography**

The Hapgood Wright Town Forest has sculpted features that reveal its glacial origin. Brister's Hill is a glacial kame formed of sand and gravel deposits that have long been exposed by gravel mining that once took place here, perhaps for material to construct Route 2 in the mid 1930s.

## **Brister's Spring**

In a shallow ravine beside the red-blazed trail that winds up to Brister's Hill, water bubbles from underground. A post identifies it as Brister's Spring, named for the freed slave who once lived nearby with his wife Fenda and their family. Thoreau mentioned in his writings that this spring was a reliable source of cool drinking water, and he recorded its temperature as 49° F. "Commonly I rested an hour or two in the shade at noon, after planting, and ate my lunch, and read a little by a spring which was the source of a swamp and of a brook, oozing from under Brister's Hill, half a mile from my field."

The spring bubbles out into a verdant water course lush with mosses, watercress and skunk cabbage. During cool, damp, and snow-covered days of winter, this place can seem magical, with mist rising up from the warmer, spring-fed hollow. In the early spring, blossoms of skunk cabbage and sunny yellow marsh marigold are a main feature of the site.

## **Brister Freeman Homesite**

On the red-blazed trail along Walden Street, a stone marks the approximate site of Brister

Freeman's late 1700s home. Brister Freeman was enslaved for 25 years to a wealthy landholder and doctor in Concord. On gaining his freedom after the Revolutionary War, he enlisted in the Continental Army, became the second freed slave in Concord to purchase land, worked as a day laborer, and raised a family.

Although Brister Freeman's time here was earlier than Thoreau's writings (he died in 1822), Thoreau considered his cabin to be in Brister Freeman's "neighborhood". "Down the road, on the right hand, on Brister's Hill, lived Brister Freeman, a handy negro, slave of Squire Cummings once... With him dwelt Fenda, his hospitable wife, who told fortunes..."

## **Thoreau's Bean Field**

The trail to Walden Pond in Thoreau's time passed through woods and open fields most likely west of today's intersection of MA Route 2 and Walden Street. In the Walden Pond State Reservation, a stone to the north of the trail reads "Thoreau's Bean Field – It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans", his field occupying 2.5 acres, now grown over.

## **Thoreau's Cabin Site**

The Thoreau cabin site with scenic views of Walden Pond marks the end of the Amble walk within the Walden Pond Reservation. Only a few foundation stones remain of the cabin he built with help from Louisa May Alcott's father Bronson Alcott, on land that was Ralph Waldo Emerson's wood lot.

Thoreau said he moved to his cabin at Walden Pond to live deliberately, to discover how to live, what to do. It was while living here from July 4, 1845 to September 6, 1847 that he wrote *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *Ktaadn [Katahdin]*, *Resistance to Civil Government* and the initial version of his well-known work *Walden*. He found the solitude at Walden that he sought, without the discomfort of a recluse, the Emerson household just an amble away for a free meal and companionship.